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undoubtedly tell us something of its history, and inform us if it were raised either to commemorate the name of Pompey, or the glory of the Roman Emperour.

[A very learned dissertation on this celebrated monument, may be found in a quarto volume of Dr. White, Arabick professor in the University, Oxford, a copy of which work is in the Boston Atheneum. It contains the substance of all the speculations of the learned for the last hundred years on the subject, and three or four plates, exhibiting a view of the column, and the excavations that were made about its foundation, when the very curious circumstance of its resting on a block of granite about five feet square, was discovered. Dr. White shews almost conclusively, that this monument was erected by Ptolemy Philadelphus, in the *Serapeum*, or Temple of Serapis, and that it was probably in honour of the first of his family.]



FOR THE NORTH-AMERICAN JOURNAL.

On the Fine Arts.

There are, perhaps, few subjects more grateful to our national pride, than the progress the fine arts have made under the genius and industry of our countrymen. There is a welcomeness in the reflection, that we have done something in this elevated department of the mind. We feel that we shall live in the works of art we have accomplished, we shall live in the sentiment which for ages has consecrated the canvass, which places the ancient painting in close company with the most elevated and venerable mental labours; which associates the most recent with the most remote age, and which promises to bear us along in perpetual remembrance. We feel a pride in these reflections, because they assure us, we shall not be forgotten: we feel, that when time shall have confirmed the decisions of nature, our age may constitute a venerable antiquity.

It is grateful to know, that in the brightest periods of the mind in earlier times, the fine arts most vigorously flourished. While some men were giving language to thought, and words to nature, by one species of signs; others were occupied with giving character to the marble, or perpetuating passing events, by the species of painting then in use. Now, it

with us the arts have preceded literature, it is merely because the peculiar circumstances under which we exist, have prevented great literary enterprise ; men of genius have not been able to command foreign efforts of art, but have laboured to supply themselves by their own industry and talent.

But with all our native spirit, and love of the arts, there has not been yet a great deal done, to keep alive the zeal, or to cherish the affection. Before, however, inquiring into the state of the fine arts among us, it would be well to consider some of the motives which have influenced so many of our artists to leave us, and to make European galleries the depositories of their best works. The inquiry is of some importance ; for the honour these artists should have reflected on America, has been yielded to other nations. In England, for instance, patronage has superceded birthright. But who will dispute the title to the fame our artists have been instrumental in bestowing on England ? Is it not a fair exchange, for the protection that country has afforded our own genius ?

There are many reasons why our artists should not have remained at home. One, and that involves all the rest, is the youthfulness of the country. From the total want of appropriate institutions in some places, and their infancy in others, we can hardly be said to possess adequate means of cultivating the arts.

Our artists have gone abroad to contemplate and study the master works of their favourite art, which were not, and could not be afforded them at home. They have gone abroad, to live under the inspection, the discipline, the influence of men who have devoted their lives to the study of the best specimens of art, and who have been eminent patrons of the arts themselves, in their own works. Some have said, we could not support the genius we were vigorous enough to produce. I grant that the cry of poverty may have deterred individuals from hazarding a support, for the uncertain immunities of fame ; but if we were possessed of the means of intellectual support, our artists would have run the chances of patronage.

Another important reason why our artists leave us, is, that in this country the publick are somewhat deficient in a refined taste for their labours. The publick with us cannot yet discriminate accurately, between the various specimens of the fine arts presented to them ; we speak here of their comparative merits. The artist may therefore fear to trust

himself, or rather his works, either to inspection or comparison. They may not please by their own merits, and comparison may result in a very unjust and unfortunate award. It is not meant that we want taste, or power of discrimination. Very few people among us can be found at all refined, who are not pleased with just delineations of nature. But the perfection of the perception, and the real enjoyment of what is true to nature, is founded either in a relish of nature itself, or in an habitual contemplation and study of the best picture landscapes. We may love these without ever having studied, or even been delighted with the real landscape. But to love them with a genuine and lasting affection, we must have given our hearts in some measure, to the exquisite combinations of the painter. To that magick of grouping, which brings together in perfect harmony, the beauties of the heavens and the earth, the cloud and the mountain, the stream and the wood. The pleasure afforded by works of art, is thus strictly and purely an intellectual enjoyment. It is not merely an instinctive, or natural perception. The ridiculous, the monstrous, the absurd in art, have ever had the most admirers. The genuine lover of nature, and of delineations of nature, must be one who has observed for himself, or studied the observations of others. If he has not possessed facilities for the study himself, but always have received nature at second hand, his criticisms will not be the less correct, if his standards have not been so. He will very often be a better critick than the mere copier of woods or hills, and detect a fault where every branch is in its place, and a thousand, where every cliff is most geographically detailed. In London men love the landscape, and know how to estimate the labours, of Turner. They look at his exquisite skies with delight, not that they have had the most favourable opportunities of studying nature, but chiefly because they have seen fine representations of nature, and are as good criticks of what is natural or not so, as if they had not inspired the eternal fogs and smoke of the city, but had lived for ever in the woods or fields. It is not meant here to speak of the perception of what appears after nature in the picture landscape, for many may possess this power, but of the genuine relish of its beauty. If these remarks be correct, it would follow, that to enjoy what is truly beautiful in art, it is necessary that the mind be deeply susceptible of what is beautiful, from habitual observation of it. It would

appear, that it is necessary that the mind should have been presented with unequivocal standards of excellence in art, or attentively observed the beautiful in nature. In fine, that the mind should have been instructed how to perceive, if it may be so expressed, by the previous sanctions of taste, that a given production of the fine arts, is, as far as it is susceptible of perfection, perfect.

If then a majority of those who among us at all patronise painting, are only delighted with the resemblance picture landscapes may bear to their conceptions of nature, but are to a degree unsusceptible of those higher pleasures of taste, which flow from a genuine relish and understanding of the effects of genius, operating on the materials offered it by nature, we have an additional reason for the emigration of our artists to other countries. This, however, is by no means the only, or the most important conclusion, to which the above remarks lead us. If they are true, we are led at once to the great importance of an institution, which shall not merely instruct artists, but which shall in itself give, and improve taste—Which shall in our own country afford our artists, the salutary, corrective influences of sound criticism, which, first acquired by the contemplation and study of the best works of art, shall, in its perfection, be able at once to trace the faintest approximations to excellence, and to discover and point out every deviation. Perhaps no country ever presented a more noble opportunity, for affording this support to genius than our own. Artists of merit appear every day on the stage; an honourable pecuniary patronage, it is true, is afforded them, in the purchase of their works. All that they now want are standard works in their profession of study, and men of taste to love, or correct the productions of their own genius.

This part of the subject has been more insisted on, because it appeared deserving of more regard, than has hitherto been bestowed upon it. Where this kind and degree of cultivation of taste for the arts are entirely wanting, the artist is in some danger, as well as the publick. The publick will ever be easily satisfied, with the decisions of the presently existing taste. Now if early efforts are admired, and only early efforts, the publick may be called upon to be pleased with but indifferent works at best, and the artist in some danger of resting in a mediocrity, which he finds regarded with admiration. Let us for a moment

suppose this state of things to continue here, that the finer details of genius are not introduced from abroad among us, or more distinguished artists do not appear, how slow will be the progress to great excellence, how hardly possible will it be for that excellence to be obtained.

It must not be concealed, that the above remarks are true so far, and no farther, than as we mean in this country to make progress with other nations in the fine arts. If our artists mean to labour with them, they must refer to the same or similar standards, and submit to a similar tribunal. It may however be a favourite project with some of our artists, to labour to give their works an original character, and by striving for a species of individuality in their labours, to found a new school in this country. They may turn from examining the specimens of the Flemish school which may lie in their way, which owe so much of their reputation to their admirable delineations of national manners, and calculate on a similar fame with their authors, if they are as successful in their illustrations of the scenery and pastoral life of their own country. But is there not some hazard in indulging a sentiment so honourable in its final cause, as this appears to be? Have we in fact enough that is peculiar in this country, to trust one's reputation exclusively to its delineation? Our country has, it is true, every variety of surface, and the vegetable productions of all climates. Its mountains are lofty, and its woods majestic—Its lakes are lost in distance, before the eye which would paint them. But would not the landscape painter, who should leave the regions of cultivation, to give his pencil to the simple service of nature, be in some danger of returning to us with his canvass loaded with a thousand woods, or washed by an interminable sea? Would there not be some hazard, that amid such luxuriance in nature, such magnificent confusion, an indistinctness of mental vision would be produced, or that the best exertions that genius might make, would be sacrificed to an affected fidelity? Suppose, on the contrary, that an artist, really possessing distinguished talents, to submit his mind to the instructions which the best efforts of genius afford, to lay in fact a foundation in their careful, but independent study, with what clearness of perception, with what powers of discrimination and combination would he approach the scenes just mentioned? Farther, have our peasantry individuality enough to insure the artist, who may

study and delineate their habits, a lasting fame? Is there enough that is peculiar in their costume, their manners, their customs and features, to enable an observer at once to recognise them in a picture? The great claim of delineations of this kind, consists in their striking truth; or in their novelty, their originality. We can ascertain their truth by our knowledge of their originals only. But for them to delight us by their truth and originality, their correctness will perhaps not be taken into the account, they must be new to us, and still bear a resemblance to what has, or does exist. We are interested in the new costume and new countenance, because they in some sort extend our knowledge of human society. And when the foreign artist descends to the detail of the amusements and mechanical occupations, to the domestick economies of his countrymen, we are still more indebted to him for the new acquaintance to which he has introduced us. He becomes in short a most interesting historian, of all that most delights us in the outside of human nature. Now many of these sources of interest must be wanting to the native artist, who confines himself to our own country. His pictures will want novelty—They will not extend our knowledge. And unless we have observed the inhabitants of our villages with more than a casual glance, unless we have caught their faint, but distinct characteristicks, the whole claim of native peculiarity will be wanting, and the painter, for us, will have gleaned them in vain.

With all the difficulties, however, that the artist under supposition may be surrounded, it may be worth an effort to do all with the scenes and beings around him, which their nature and characters will enable him to do. If there be not much that is peculiar, if nothing new, he will not fail of his reward, or be disappointed of his fame, if he gives us nature as it is, and manners as he may find them. If, however, without studying the lessons which the works of the great masters in landscape teach, he studies our native scenery and manners, his labour will not be the less, because he finds a profusion of materials; his labour of selection will be the greater, because the objects offered him are the more numerous. His imagination will not be allowed repose, because his eye meets new objects on every side it turns. He must be true, and at the same time original. He must give us the landscape of nature; but if he means to delight

cultivated taste, his own genius must not be allowed to slumber, and his own invention must labour among the things which are made.

These remarks are suggested, not to depress that honourable enterprise, which would detain a man of real genius among the scenes, or manners of his native country ; they have been made, because these scenes and these manners have been adverted to by some, as the best studies for the young artist, and because their peculiarities, their originality, have been considered as even better objects for study, than the management of nature in other countries, which fine picture landscapes consist in, and those delineations of foreign manners, which distinguish peculiar schools. It may have been thought, that the painter of our own country would have an easy road to fame. It has been attempted in the above remarks to show, that the labours of genius are efforts of mind, and that he who seeks for reputation in feeble exertions, or at best but mechanical skill, is in some danger of being disappointed of his fame. He may be a gainer at home, but he will be a loser abroad ; and above all, his fame will not be safe, even in his own country, provided its maturer age be blessed with a better taste.

Having at some length, inquired into some of the motives which may influence our artists to leave their own country, the question returns upon us, with which these remarks commenced, what is the state of the arts in this country ? To give a general answer to this question, we may reply, that we are rich in our treasure of genius, but are somewhat deficient in taste. This may be called a negative state, and it may be said, that a capacity to produce great works in the fine arts, can only be inferred from what has been already done, and that if such works exist among us, on our own principle, their influence must have been, to have given and corrected taste. As imposing however as the reply may seem, and as unsatisfactory as our remarks may appear, a few considerations may shew that they are not altogether unfounded.

Some of our best artists, perhaps for the reasons assigned in this paper, have left us. Should any one doubt that they are men of extraordinary powers, they have only to visit for a moment the regions they now inhabit, and they will return fully satisfied. What modern European gallery is there, which has not been enriched by their works ? Who is the president of the Royal Academy in England, and who

is he who already seems to have borrowed his mantle of this venerable father? These are our countrymen, and their works speak to us from abroad, and yield us the fame of genius, if we have been unable to offer in exchange the protection of taste, and of patronage. Mr. West, in a conversation with the writer, remarked, that America was a nursery of artists—That he, at his advanced age, recollected many a schoolfellow, who discovered at school indications of genius for the fine arts, which, if cultivated, might have challenged for them lasting fame. But that we have genius, we need not go to our countrymen abroad for evidence. In this town, for instance, we have artists who, though purely the children of nature, and the best specimens of the fine arts, for whose contemplation and study are their own works, have, notwithstanding, laboured for an age, beyond their own, and will furnish abundant evidence, that theirs was an age not destitute of genius.

The best works of our greatest artists, are, however, beyond our reach, and their salutary influences of course denied us. Those of our younger artists are few in number, and are too much dispersed to afford them beneficial instructions. If it therefore be proved, that we are rich in genius, our deficiency in taste is an inductive probability. And this conclusion rests on this simple supposition, that the works of genius, their contemplation and study, are the legitimate sources of taste, and that the reaction of taste, viz. its powerfully corrective influences, are essentially necessary, or at least, among the surest means of the best development of genius itself.

If what is contained in these pages be true, if such be the actual state of the fine arts among us, there is nothing reproachful in the truth, or melancholy in the condition. It would appear, on the contrary, that there was every thing to excite to the most liberal exertions, and the best grounds for expecting a successful issue. If the men of fine genius among us be encouraged, if they are excited to those efforts, which the powerful stimulus of the finest works of art would call forth, and to which their constant reference to their own works can hardly be expected to awaken them, we shall not long be deficient in taste, nor our country despoiled of the fame which is her natural and legitimate right. The institution now in contemplation in this place, has all these objects in view, and an effort so honourable, it is trusted, cannot but succeed.